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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 000894

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TAGS: [EAIR](#) [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [BEXP](#) [BG](#)
SUBJECT: CIVIL AVIATION OFFICIALS KEEN TO REGAIN CAT 1 STATUS;
SUPPORTING BIMAN PLANS TO BUY BOEINGS FOR US FLIGHTS

REF A: DHAKA 770 B: DHAKA 691 C: DHAKA 540 D: 08 DHAKA 474

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SUMMARY

1. (SBU) Bangladesh civil aviation officials voiced their keen desire to see Bangladesh upgraded to Category 1 status during a recent visit by Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) representatives. By improving aviation safety to reach Category 1 status, civil aviation authorities would help state-owned Biman Airlines resume and sustain weekly flights to the United States, as part of a high-profile effort to revitalize Biman. Civil aviation safety officials shared the results of an International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) audit and discussed Bangladesh's action plan to address aviation safety deficiencies. FAA reps said they might be able to provide technical assistance and recommended further consultations at an ICAO regional meeting in Osaka in October. Biman's plan to resume U.S. flights has galvanized civil aviation officials to try to achieve Cat 1 status by the time Boeing delivers its first tranche of new aircraft in 2011; however, many bureaucratic, technical and financial challenges remain.

POLITICAL PRESSURE FOR CAT 1 STATUS

2. (SBU) Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) Chairman Sakeb Majlis told the Senior FAA Representative South Asia, Aaron Wilkins, that Bangladesh needed to obtain Category 1 status "at any cost" to support Biman's planned flights to the United States. CAAB staff discussed their prior engagement with the FAA, preliminary results from a 2009 ICAO audit, and a draft action plan to address deficiencies identified in the audit.

3. (SBU) Wilkins reaffirmed the FAA's willingness to work with the CAAB to strengthen civil aviation security, but cautioned that CAAB would need strong and sustained political support from the GOB through the long process towards Category 1 certification. He noted the CAAB had failed to follow through on similar requests to the FAA in 2007 due to CAAB concerns over a draft agreement and CAAB's limited funding for technical assistance.

4. (SBU) Minister of Civil Aviation and Tourism Ghulam Quader said FAA recertification was critical to Biman's plans and pledged strong political support for CAAB's efforts. He asked for details of

technical assistance and funding requirements but emphasized the CAAB would "have to get it done," regardless of the cost. Wilkins noted that different resources might be tapped to improve aviation safety, including the FAA's joint program with the U.S. Trade and Development Agency (USTDA) that could share the cost of an initial technical assessment.

BIMAN WANTS TO RESUME JFK FLIGHTS

15. (SBU) National airline Biman Bangladesh plans to resume bi-weekly flights to JFK airport, which were suspended in 2006 in part because Biman's aging aircraft could not make the long flight from Dhaka to New York. Biman began these flights in 1993 when the CAAB had a "pass" rating with the FAA, but the flights were frozen in 1997 after the FAA's assessment under its International Aviation Safety Assessments (IASA) program placed the CAAB in Category 2 status. The FAA withdrew its approval for Biman's JFK flights in April 2008 after Biman failed to use the route for over a year. Biman recently reacquired landing rights at JFK and wants to resume flights by early 2010, using 777-300 aircraft "wet-leased" from an operator in a Category 1 country. In the longer term, Biman plans to purchase 4 777-300ERs from Boeing, two of which will be used for JFK flights following their delivery in late 2011 (ref B, C and D). This will require the CAAB to achieve Cat 1 status by the time these planes are delivered in 2011. Post will provide an update septel on Biman's plans for leasing and acquiring aircraft.

NEXT STEPS: MOU AND OSAKA BILAT

16. (SBU) The FAA rep offered to share a draft memorandum of understanding CAAB would need to sign to establish a framework for FAA assistance. One CAAB safety manager explained that a memorandum of agreement (MOA) proposed by the FAA in 2007 included some

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provisions that were "not in favor of the interest of Bangladesh". After hesitating over this language, they chose to defer the agreement until after the ICAO audit. FAA later noted the draft MOA proposed in 2007 did not differ significantly from the current template FAA used for technical assistance programs.

17. (SBU) FAA rep Wilkins promised to share the audit and action plan with FAA technical staff and recommended follow-up bilateral meetings at the Directors General of Civil Aviation Conference in Osaka, Japan October 12-16, where FAA Administrator Randy Babbitt will lead a U.S. delegation. During these meetings, the parties can begin discussing an action plan to prepare the CAAB for an eventual IASA assessment before Boeing delivers planes to Biman in 2011. At the same time, CAAB will need to finalize the draft MOU before requesting a technical assessment by FAA flight standards staff.

COMMENT

18. (SBU) A convergence of factors - the ICAO audit, Biman's rebranding and the expected delivery of Boeings starting in 2011 - is setting the stage for Bangladesh to make real progress on civil aviation safety. By supporting these efforts, we can help lay the foundation for the Boeing deal to move forward. Since more than a decade has passed since its last IASA assessment, the CAAB will need to devote considerable energy and resources to prepare for an IASA audit. While the CAAB seems to have strong political backing, it will need to overcome many bureaucratic, technical and financial obstacles to reach Cat 1 status. Post will coordinate with FAA, USTDA and the CAAB to facilitate this process, which advances Mission goals of improving aviation safety and supporting the USD 1.2 billion sale of Boeing planes to Biman.

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